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FASCES

NORWID'S INTUITIONS IN READING A SYMBOL

History is one of the main motifs and topics in Norwid's work, as well as one of the basic dimensions and contexts of his thoughts on the human and the world. Norwid saw the tension between great history and small history, between the individual and the general¹, between life and history in an exceptionally modern manner. One can see it on nearly every page of his works, and its significance as a research category is proved by numerous books and articles focused on that issue, to mention just the recently published book *Norwid wobec historii* by multiple authors. In Łukasz Niewczas's introduction to that book, where he gives a synthetic view on the scope and trends of the available research, one can read:

[...] the element of historicity does not manifest itself in his work only in the most obvious manner: in the topical-problematic sphere, as an object of description, reflection and metareflection. Historicity enters Norwid's opus, starting from the level of the most basic elements. It can be noticed if you follow, for instance, the immersion in historicity found in Norwid's poetic language [...]. Remote historic sources inspire the poet's choices and genre solutions [...]. History supplies the repertoire of Norwid's plots and train of characters, and impacts the manner of shaping the space-time continuum. [...] History is one of the keystones of that literary output; a category which defines the identity of Norwid's work, allowing to describe it with the help of the category of the whole, so important for the poet.

¹ Jacques Le Goff wrote: "The most flagrant contradiction of history is, beyond doubt, the fact that its object is singular [...], while [history's] aim [...] is to find the universal, the general, the regular." (J. LE GOFF, *Storia e Memoria*, Einaudi, Torino 1988, p. 20, English translation after: Ilaria Rigoli, *The Stench of Truth: Making History by Means of Literature in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children*, https://issuu.com/filitesi/docs/the_stench_of_truth (accessed 30.04.2018), p. 6).

Yet for Norwid, history is not a closed and immobilised reality, not a remote island isolated from its contemporary *hic et nunc*. [...] Hence what is historic, usually appears in his works in an inseparable nexus with modernity².

Writing a historic novel or poem, an author makes a choice from the available knowledge of the past, usually summoning not only the characters typical for the particular period, but also profusely using the store of material mementoes from the past, which contribute to what may be called the flavour of the era³. In building the plot, the author chooses representative elements characteristic for the given period, but also such as are significant for the present either in themselves or in their historic metamorphoses. The choice of the where and when, the choice of characters, manner of narration, the degree to which the presented world is filled with the specificity of material objects, historic figures and author's comments – all those build the autonomy of the literary "truth" of the work and evoke the past for the present. Those rather obvious principles also concern the artistic shaping of the poem *Quidam*, whose selected thematics will be further discussed here.

Let us take a look at the store of historical information contained in the short (48 lines) initial song of the work, which introduces the main protagonist and the road he traversed in order to get to Rome. The reader learns directly from the narrator from what country the Epirote comes, learns of the multinationality of the then society (blood mixing), gets to know the manners of communication (by sea and by land) and the names of several settlements along the traditional route leading from the South to Rome. Readers are informed of the roads being built in the state, get detailed data on the materials used for bridge construction, the manner of treating and connecting rocks, a description of the Caesar's role in building road infrastructure and developing architecture in the state, learn the Caesar's name – and thus the time of action, learn about the merchant caravans as a manner of transporting goods, about the existing controls systems and fees at town tollgates, the custom's office, existing gates, a guard's weapons, local currency, finally about the language used by the inhabitants of Rome. You receive all that historical and

² Ł. NIEWCZAS, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Norwid wobec historii*, E. Chlebowska, Ł. Niewczas (eds.), Lublin 2014, pp. 6-7.

³ The "material mementoes" could possibly include the concept of "semiophors" – a proposal by Krzysztof Pomian combining history, cultural anthropology and museum studies. Pomian defines semiophors as objects of cultural value, which carry specific meanings for the particular community, although that does not exclude retaining their utilitarian function. While such a possibility of analysing the functions of at least some of the objects present in Norwid's poetry is indicated here, it is not used in this study. See K. POMIAN, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Lublin 2006, pp. 100-101 *passim*.

verifiable data⁴ directly from the narrator. His store of knowledge is enriched with reported conversations from the caravan, concerning not only political issues (the last census, legislative changes in the state), but also practical ones, such as optimum lodgings for the night for pack animals – here, two more specific names of places in Rome appear. The rest of the narration is more general and “timeless”: it sketches out the physical appearance of the protagonist, betrays to the readers his expectations and hopes relating to the Eternal City, his tendency to think and dream, it ironically comments on the Caesar’s architectural aspirations as juxtaposed to human effort and suffering thus generated, in an atmospheric digression it sketches the atmosphere of a Roman evening, and finally, it reveals the name of the story’s protagonist.

That cursory enumeration shows what scale of the phenomenon is considered. If one were to go through the other chapters of the poem in the same manner, it would turn out that the narrator’s erudition in an uncommonly broad scope serves to enrich the presented world with material, intellectual, social, cultural and spiritual motifs. Aventine Hill, biga, vigils, cypresses, fastigium, Knidos, Sybille, laurels, mosaics, peristyle, arabesques, Etruscan lamp, lyre, parchment rolls – these are all further examples of furnishing the space of the poem with details from the historic era, to take just the examples from the next two songs.

Beside characteristic elements of the material world in the poem, the reader meets an ample gallery of people, some of whom – in the author’s intention – represents two cultural circles: the Greek and the Jewish one. You see representatives of many professions and classes: from Egyptian servants, through gladiators, merchants, soldiers, courtesans, gardeners, priests, denunciators, representatives of aristocracy and intelligentsia of that time, i.e. philosophers, grammarians and magicians. The narration includes in-depth descriptions of various Roman houses, the City’s topography, details of clothing and social customs, techniques of transmitting information, or manners of transport in Rome. Separate fragments of the poem are dedicated to detailed descriptions of the Caesar, the Roman art and its connections to Greek tradition. Homage to the legions takes an important place. You learn much about the then educational system, social life, or medical practices. A particular variety of that level of narration are places where the narrator breaks away from the dominant narration strategy and forms explicit comparisons and judgements in direct comments, openly juxtaposing historic events with their contemporary – i.e. 19th-century equivalents.

⁴ For instance, a description of the successive journey stops (Regium – Puteoli – Via Appia – Trastubernae – Rome) of identical content can be found both in the *Acts of the Apostles* and in *De vita Caesarum (The Twelve Caesars)*.

Another layer of information concerning the objects, people and events in the poem comes not from the narrator, but from the protagonists themselves. Their statements of various kinds serve to broaden the mutual descriptions, present opinions on various topics, introduce references to historic or mythological figures, or comments concerning political events, or refer to specific edicts or other documents.

And finally, the third level needs to be distinguished – that of the author's comments. In some fragments, he comes very close to the position of the narrator, and sometimes even takes over that role. It is best seen in the extensive footnotes, which are meant to document the author's erudition and refer the reader to further cognitive and interpretational motifs.

This rather obvious stratification of narration layers is proposed here as some of the motifs and topics appear at all three levels, which indirectly indicates their compositional and ideological significance in the poem. One of such motifs are *fascēs*, and to that I would like to dedicate the main part of my analysis.

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Fascēs – most likely taken from the Etruscans – were an essential attribute of lictors, who accompanied higher officials, military leaders and the Caesar as bodyguards⁵. Materially, *fascēs* were simply a set of birch or elm rods bound in the form of a bundle, carried by a lictor on the shoulder (*cum fascibus*). The bundle of rods was carried by the lictor as a symbol of power – first before kings, and later before consuls, praetors and dictators. The bundle could hold an axe with its blade turned outside (*cum fascibus et securibus*), but that was practiced only outside of Rome. In the city, *fascēs* usually did not contain an axe, although some exceptions to the rule occurred. Outside of the *pomerium* borders, different customs were observed, and lictors accompanying officials and consuls were entitled to carry axes in their *fascēs* when their masters e.g. commanded an army.

Sometimes, *fascēs* were additionally crowned with laurel wreaths – that was done by a victorious leader, celebrated as an emperor by his soldiers. A retinue of lictors with *fascēs* accompanied an official during his service. Their main practical

⁵ Information on *fascēs* given here is taken from various sources, mainly encyclopaedias, dictionaries and textbooks on ancient history, e.g. *Dzieje powszechne ilustrowane. Ilustrowana historia starożytna* (edited by L. Kubala, vol. II, Vienna [n.d.]). The below figure is taken from the source quoted above. An extensive entry on *fascēs* is given in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* by W. Smith and Ch. Anthon (New York 1843, p. 431). Among online sources, noteworthy is the webpage <http://www.livius.org/concept/lictor/>.

tasks were simply to clear the way and induce the crowd to show respect. Therefore, tall and strong men were chosen for that function. Often, they were former centurions⁶. Thus they could be viewed as guards.

Fasces are among the most recognisable and durable symbols of ancient Rome. They were the traditional attribute of state officials regardless of systemic, legal or social changes. Their images can be found on coins minted by consuls, on reliefs, or as a frequent decorative motif of Roman architecture.



Lictors with *fasces*. Picture of a relief from the Marc Aurelius column in Rome.

Livy ascribes the introduction of *fasces* to Romulus. The symbolic number of 12 lictors is connected with the number of the mythical kings. Publius Valerius Publicola, the first consul of the republic after banishing the Tarquins in 509 BC, reduced the number of lictors from the previous 24 to 12. For a long time, a dozen

⁶ Contemporary Google translator suggests meanings from “vigils” to “officials”.

lictors accompanied alternately one and then the other consul for a month⁷. That same Publicola ordered the axes to be removed from lictor attributes within the area of Rome.

During the first decemvirate, *fasces* were carried only in front of the one man out of the ten who was actually holding the office on that particular day. But already during the second decemvirate, when the tendency for tyranny was becoming noticeable, each of them carried *fasces* with an axe. The dictator was entitled to a retinue of 24 lictors, a praetor – two, army commanders – six. The number could change – the Arch of Titus shows the victor with thirteen lictors. Proconsuls and governors in provinces were accompanied by six lictors with *fasces*. When a lictor retinue met an official of a higher rank, the *fasces* were lowered before him to show subordination and respect.

The functions fulfilled by lictors were strongly rooted in the ancient customs. Their presence by the side of the speaking official is considered the reason for the large size of the speech platform at Forum Romanum. It had to hold not just the consul, but his whole escort. Lictors knocked at household gates and opened the doors. They were responsible for the official's security also at his house and when he visited temples, the theatre or the baths. Yet their basic task was to arrest suspects and punish the guilty. As an attribute, *fasces* were related to those very functions: the canes could originally be used to flog convicts, and the axe to perform executions. Such immediacy of action was possible until mid-fifth century. That type of execution towards Roman citizens was abolished with the Law of the Twelve Tables. Lictors wore togas and were quite well paid – they received about two thirds of a legionary's pay. An escort of lictors was also granted to vestal virgins and sometimes to private persons – on special occasions, such as funerals or rallies – to show the City's respect for the particular person.

The word "lictor" comes probably from the verb "ligare" – to tie. It is likely since the lictor prepared *fasces* himself, by tying the canes together. According

⁷ See I. LEWANDOWSKI, *Gajusz Waleriusz Maksymus, czyli historia moralizująca, jej losy w dawnych epokach oraz polski przekład 4,1, praef., 1–15*; "Studia Europaea Gnesnensia" 9(2014), p. 211 – "1. And thus, to start with the very beginning of the existence of the highest office, when Publius Valerius, named Publicola due to the esteem he showed to the majesty of the [Roman] people, noted on banishing the kings that all their power and all its signs were shifted onto him under the term "consulate", thanks to his moderation he reduced the extent of the hated office to a quite tolerable form. He stripped the rod bundles of the axes and had them bowed before the people at the assembly. He also reduced their number by half and took Spurius Lucretius as a co-ruler; since Spurius was older, Publius had him handed the rods first. He also passed a law at centuriate assemblies that no official was allowed to flog or kill a Roman citizen who appealed to the people. In that way he gradually weakened his own authority to give increasing freedom to the society."

to other sources, a lictor would tie the hands of the arrested, and thus this “tying” action could also explain the origins of the name⁸.

Fasces, in turn, is the Plural of the noun *fascis*, meaning a bundle of e.g. wood, from Proto-Italic *faski (bundle, cluster) and probably from Pre-Indo-European *bhasko (to tie, a tied bundle). I should briefly mention here that the same source gave origin to the word *fascinum*, which shall return in this discussion⁹. There is also the closely related word “fascine”, meaning a bundle of branches or rods bound together, used to strengthen the sides of embankments. Earlier, fascines were also used for fortifications and road construction¹⁰.

The tales and parables of many nations contain a story of a father who was unable to control his adolescent sons. The village sage handed him a bundle of sticks, telling him to break it. When the father could not do it because the resistance was too strong, the sage untied the bundle and told him to break the sticks individually. That turned out to take no effort at all¹¹. In a word – an obvious case, socially and didactically. The primary sense of a bundle of rods or sticks doubtlessly leads to the concept of structure. Tying loose elements in a bundle or cluster changes their joint durability, and builds new quality. The phenomenon is analogous to the mechanism of splicing a line from single strings or wires. The load the splice may hold exceeds by several degrees the sum of critical loads of the individual elements building it. That mechanical principle translates also to the social dimension. It can be seen e.g. in the manifestations of the power of crowd, in effective activity of corporations and other organised forms of human activity. Therefore, *fasces* may be viewed positively, as a symbol of the added value of a community, institution or state, showing its power and – when you consider the axe – its effectiveness, inevitability and readiness both to judge and to defend its representatives. Those features make *fasces* to a very distinctive symbol of strong statehood, referring back to the tradition of ancient Rome. Hence their presence in the emblems of France, Ecuador, tsar Petersburg, in the symbols and architectural details of the United States Congress. They act foremostly as a positive sign of community and state power. And yet Norwid presents them quite differently.

⁸ Another theory traces “lictor” back to Etruscan roots and the term “lauchum”, meaning royalty and related to the function of accompanying the king fulfilling his duties.

⁹ See e.g.: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=f&p=5>

¹⁰ The fascine appears in literature e.g. in Adam Mickiewicz’s *Reduta Ordon* (lines 49-50): “Ura! ura! Patrz, blisko reduty, już w rowy / Walą się, na *faszynę* kładąc swe tułowy” [own emphasis].

¹¹ See e.g. Aesop: <https://fablesfoaesop.com/the-father-his-sons-and-the-bundle-of-sticks.html>.

Also, the motif of rods held by Christ, appearing in passional iconography of *Ecce Homo* images, is often interpreted as a sign of ironic mocking of royal authority. One can easily retrace the path to the source for reading the symbol in such a manner in that very bundle of rods carried before Roman kings¹².

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The motif of *fasces* – non-thematised, it should be noted – can be found in fragment VII of the poem, which is the first dynamic episode of the work: a description of a group of captured Christians led to trial. A group of mounted soldiers is clearing the way through the crowd for the praetor and the prisoners following him, surrounded by guards:

Ten, z wolna jadąc, piesze wiódł szeregi,
 55 Do środka w koło nieporządnie zwite,
 Jak *cyrk* przenośny z okolnymi brzegi
 I oś mający stanowczo nie wbię.
 Tą osią byli do pół obnażeni
 Mężę trzej, dobrze powrozem ściśnieni,
 60 Lecz onych ledwo widziałeś niekiedy
 Czoła lub piersi, nagością świecące,
 Wśród chmur zwichrzonej dokoła czeredy –
 To wyjawione, to zapadające.
 I były one jakoby członkami,
 65 Co nieraz leżą na cyrku drgające,
 I lśniły one za różeg sнопami –
 Różeg, co sądy znaczą i liktorów –
 Jak białe lilie gęsto ogrodzone.
 Jak białe lilie z sadu wychylone,
 70 Widne przez wrota szerokich toporów,
 Co przywierały się lub zawierały,
 Skoro się mężę niosący je wili
 Ulicą krzywą, pod stopami skały.

Przed onym płotem toporów i wici
 75 Szli i kapłani, niosąc kadzielnice: [...]
 (DW III, 147)

¹² “His wrists are bound together by a coarse rope looped around twice. They have put a reed in one of his hands as a kind of scepter and a bundle of branches in the other, symbols mocking his royalty”. See Fr. R. CANTALAMESSA, Good Friday homily for 2015, at <https://zenit.org/articles/father-cantalamezza-s-good-friday-homily-8/> (accessed 30.04.2018).

The circus motif from this fragment is aptly and functionally interpreted by Zdzisław Łapiński in his classical treaty, relating it to an anticipation of further action: the trial of the Christians and the threat of martyr death. Further, he writes:

The detailed and consistent development of the circus and martyr imagery, graphic isolation of the word "circus", indicate even clearer that the introduction of such motifs is not conditioned by mere visual similarities. Norwid refers to the general situation of the followers of the new faith, and foreshadows future scenes¹³.

However, the matter may not be as simple as that if one remembers the archaic meaning of the word "circus", i.e. "circle". There are also "okolne brzegi" [circle's edges], "oś" [axis], and thus a strong reference to the image of circularity of the cramped group, surrounded by the crowd and by lictors' rod bundles, which may also remind one of the masts of a circus tent. It is regrettable that that outstanding analysis ends on line 65 and does not consider following lines, which are of interest here. Starting off with the picturesque visual of lighter patches of bared bodies of the captives contrasting with the darker crowd, with the amplitude of their appearance and disappearance, the poet consistently connects the captives with light colours: not only do their bodies appear as lighter patches, they are even compared to white lilies. That is another anticipation of the martyr symbolism, which unobtrusively changes the circus into an isolated space of a garden. The element limiting and closing off that positively marked area are the aggressive or oppressive "snopy różeg" [cane bunches] and "wrota toporów" [axe gates], meaning *fasces*. It is worth noting that the motif is not introduced lexically, but with a symbolic image. The information is given that the canes are connected with lictors and the judicial institution, but the actual name of the attribute is not introduced in that fragment. Perhaps it happens so because the narration perspective is close or identical with that of the Epirote, who is only starting to learn about Roman institutional world and is thus entitled not to know all the names for the attributes of power. Anyway, "różgi, co sądy znaczą i liktorów" [the canes which mean judgement and lictors] are an example of the artist introducing the reader into the ancient world of the poem through image, and not through lexis. The main protagonist also experiences for the first time the dynamic confrontation of his safe life focused on philosophical deliberations with the real drama of dividing and imprisoning people, subjecting them to repression from state officials, done in broad Roman daylight.

¹³ Z. ŁAPIŃSKI, *Quidam. Obrazowanie*, [in:] IDEM, *O Norwidzie. Rzeczy dawne i najdawniejsze*, Lublin 2014, p. 45.

The motif of *fascēs* as a systematised concept appears in the poem for the first time somewhat later, in song X, not as an isolated fragment of the work's historical colouring or an action-related object, but as an element of a modernising comparison of the narrator:

75 Rzym w estetyce był już, jak za wiele
Wieków Gallowie w błotach swych być mają,
Albo Anglowie – gdy przypuszczę śmieie,
Że ci na przykład świata ster trzymają.
I tworzą sobie Rzemy jakie nowe,
I smak, i piękność wedle siebie głoszą,
80 Nie dramatyczną – lecz bóstwo jałowe,
W którym nie chodzą żywi – które noszą
Jak *fascēs* – słowem coś, co jest niezdrowe.
(DW III, 167)

In that somewhat twisted narrative construction, *fascēs* become a sign of a social ailment. Used as a comparative element in some general criticism of aesthetics or art contemporary to Norwid, they are combined with particularism of taste, detachment from universal values, artificiality and torpor, isolation from the essence of culture, falsehood. The sense of the concept is not explained here. The *comparans*, treated as obvious and understandable, is narrowed down to one negative image of the author's diagnosis, and used as a symbol of the unnatural and false nature of social behaviours: a useful ornament or attribute which strikes with its artificiality and torpor.

The lack of explanation from the narrator about what *fascēs* are was indicated here. The first quotation described only their appearance, this one introduced just the name. The author's explanation of the lictor's attribute, given in a footnote, appears much later, in the poem's climactic chapter, i.e. song XXIV. Such a solution can hardly be viewed as logically apt in a poem with a historic dominant, full of learned, matter-of-fact explanations given frequently as appropriate. This particular explanation should rather be viewed as an excuse for deliberating on other topics, started or signalled in the extensive note of the author, relating – as a matter of fact – not so much to *fascēs* as to *fascination*. Below the note to line 66 of that song:

Fascēs – pęk-lóz noszony przez liktorów na znak czujnej dyscypliny rządu. – Że pierwsza zwłaszcza epoka prawa rzymskiego – sabińska – obejmowała w praktyce swej *cały rytuał mimiczny*, *fascēs* takie pewnym sposobem wnoszone gdzieś, wywierało mag-netyczny urok. – Należałoby, aby czytelnik bliżej był obznajmiony z treścią żywota społeczeństw starożytnych, czego *literalne książek samych czytanie*, bez czytania pom-

ników sztuki niepisanej i żywotów współczesnych, o ile są tradycyjnymi, nie nauczy; aby z tych słów pojął, o ile i jako filologiczne pochodzenie wyrazu *fascinatia* wywodzi się od *fascēs*. Były różne akcenta mimiczne nierozłączne z odwoływaniem się do prawa, a właściwe naturom spraw przed trybunał wytaczanych i prawie nie mniej od samejże *literary kodeksu* ważne. Ale do powieści niniejszej dopiski tak szerokie mogłyby być zanadto mnogie – zostawia się je przeto uwadze i studiom czytelnika. (DW III, 258-259)

[*Fasces – twig-bunch* carried by lictors as a sign of the government's vigilant discipline. – As particularly the first era of Roman law – the Sabine one – embraced in its practice the *whole mimic ritual*, the *fascēs*, when carried into some place, must have cast a magnetic spell. – A reader ought to be familiarised with the contents of ancient societies' lives, which cannot be taken from mere *reading the books to the letter* and not reading monuments of unwritten art and modern lives, as long as they yield to tradition; the reader ought to understand from those words how and in how far the philological origins of the term *fascinatia* go back to *fascēs*. There were various mimic accents inseparable from legal reference and characteristic of the nature of cases brought before the tribunal, and [they were] nearly no less important than the very *letter of the code*. But such broad comments might have been too numerous for this work – those are therefore left to the reader's own attention and study.]

The tone of that statement often provoked researchers of receptive conditions of Norwid's literary output to formulate some barbed comments on the maximalist requirements and expectations he had of the reader and of reading conditions: sophistication and erudition, the practice of reading culture texts, a critical interpretation sense beyond literal reading, and extensive knowledge on the historic context. This somewhat patronising attitude with a tone of doubting the hermeneutic potential may still irritate today. Yet it may also result from other reasons: a high complexity and multifaceted nature of the processes of researching and learning historic truth, as mentioned by the poet; such processes can indeed not be documented in just a few sentences. Creating the criterion of trust towards the author's knowledge and competence, Norwid directs our attention to an issue of – formally – philological nature, suggesting the origins of the word *fascinatia* come from *fascēs*.

In the fragment of the poem concerned by the note, the narration analyses the phenomenon of fascination in a broad comment (at the occasion of indicating the socially unfounded usurpation of aristocracy). Hence likely the female form *fascinatia* provided by Norwid instead of the original Latin *fascinatio*. The word comes from *fascinum* and the related verb *fascinare*. It is difficult to say what linguistic findings Norwid used as basis for his etymological thesis. Yet in the light of today's philological knowledge the correctness of his intuition cannot be overruled. Even if *fascinatio* does not come from *fascēs*, they are definitely

related through a common ancestor: the Pre-Indo-European *bhasko, mentioned above.

The Latin *fascinare* means to entrance, bewitch, enchant. In his book *Magia antyczna*, Andrzej Wypustek dedicated a separate subchapter to the issues of *fascinum* and *fascinatio*¹⁴. He ascribes those phenomena to a strong fear of magic, fear of dangerous envy, jealousy, the “evil eye”, demons. The supernatural power allowing to cast a spell is precisely *fascinum*¹⁵. The most common belief was that the power was related to the “evil eye”, the still known and lingering conviction that a spell could be cast e.g. on an infant with a look. To neutralise that threat, a multitude of amulets were manufactured in the antiquity (usually in a phallic shape), and protective symbols were placed on everyday objects, terracotta, mosaics, surrounding images of the “evil eye” with them. With time, the term came to designate the amulets themselves, as well. In his search for the etymology of fascination, which irritated him as a social phenomenon, an etymology which would allow to disparage the concept with merely its lexical matter, Norwid directs our attention towards the negative symbolism of *fascēs*. Even if he is wrong, he very aptly indicates in this comment the semantic context of ritual forms of communication, mimics or dramatisation of court ceremony as elements directly related to magic or even co-creating the “magnetic charm” of certain behaviours, gestures, objects. His intuition in that respect has much later been confirmed by research and conclusions of archaeologists, anthropologists, religion and myth scholars. Those findings prove that e.g. a red bow on an infant’s pram, or on a garter to help pass the final exams, has a very long tradition going back to a magical vision of the world¹⁶.

In his last book, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Mircea Eliade devoted several dozen pages to analysing the symbolic sense of the act of tying¹⁷. As it turns out, there is a whole complex of stories, myths, rites and behaviours related to that act which permeate Indo-European mythology. The magi-

¹⁴ A. WYPUSTEK, *Magia antyczna*, Wrocław 2001, pp. 356-360.

¹⁵ *Fascinum* is also the embodiment of the divine phallus, object of cult of *fascinus populi Romani*. Its large statue was tended by the Vestal Virgins, just like other deities. The statue was carried in processions in Rome and was an important element of state and social rituals.

¹⁶ “Cultural memory transforms history into myth. It allows to semitise history, which becomes purposeful and necessary,” Hanna Jurkowska wrote on the concept by Jan Assmann (mythomoteur of cultural memory) in her book: *Pamięć sentymentalna. Praktyki pamięci w kręgu Towarzystwa Warszawskiego Przyjaciół Nauk i w Puławach Izabeli Czartoryskiej* (Warszawa 2014, p. 13).

¹⁷ M. ELIADE, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, transl. by Ph. Mairet, Princeton University Press 1961 (chapter III: The „God who Binds” and the Symbolism of Knots, pp. 92-124).

cal power of Varuna is presented in the form of a rope, knot or knots. Similarly, Odin has the power to paralyse his enemies. According to Plutarch, "certain men always walked in front of Romulus, «men armed with rods for keeping back the crowd, and girded with straps, ready to bind at once those whom he ordered them to bind»"¹⁸. "Snares" are ailments, and the most powerful "binding" is death. The Bible speaks of the snares of death and cords of Sheol. In many cultures, the thread of life signifies destiny. Tying knots or binding is present in many initiation rituals.

Myth analysis leads to the conclusion that "binding" is a magical/religious power, found in nearly all forms of religion in history, and has enormous significance in magic, sorcery and folk medicine. Eliade found the complex of "tying" at cosmologic, magic, religious, initiation and soteriologic levels. Magic ties were used against human enemies (during wars), but also as amulets against spells, diseases, or death. Ethnographers note a common belief that on certain events (birth, death) you should have nothing with knots on you. Knots were used to bind a sick part of the body to heal it, but they were also tied to cast a spell. There is a noticeable constant ambivalence of function: negative vs positive¹⁹. In many languages, words signifying an act of tying or binding are also used to speak of spells, e.g. in Turkish, Greek, Romanian or Latin. More on the issue below:

The Latin *fascinum*, "charm, malefic spell" is related to *fascia*, "band, bandage", and to *fascis*, "bundle"; *ligāre*, "to tie", and *ligātūra*, "act of tying" also mean "to charm" and "charm" [...]. All this etymology confirms the idea that the act of binding is essentially magical [...]. Etymologically, *religio* also denotes a form of "attachment" to the divinity [...]²⁰.

A somewhat longer explanation has been given here, since the documentation collected and interpreted by the researcher indicates that the bundle of bound rods carried by a lictor indeed had a magic meaning to it, as well. Thus Norwid's distinction of that element as an authority-enhancing factor²¹ and carrier of magical power is fully justified.

Gerd Althoff thus writes in his *Macht der Rituale*:

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁹ That ambivalence may explain the parallel acceptance and rejection of the positive symbolism of *fascies*.

²⁰ E. ELIADE, *Images and Symbols*, p. 115. The list easily extends also to the Polish terms: *pełtanie* (tying) and *opęłtanie* (demonic possession).

²¹ Aleida and Jan Assmanns' concept of supraindividual memory considers and explains the close connection between authority and memory – as well as the inevitability of manipulation. See J. ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Globally, the following initial situation should be indicated: societies which practice face-to-face communication have a high demand for rituals, because personal meetings require ritual organisation²².

That aspect of ritual communication is worth stressing. It occurs at every occasion when someone comes in contact with an institution, a person with a state official, an individual with the general public. Its role can be clearly seen in jurisdiction, in the court setting, places permanently assigned to the prosecutor and the defence lawyer in a court room, and finally, in their robes. A modern author thus characterises the functions of a prosecutor's gown:

The archetype of the robe is doubtlessly the Roman toga [...]. Clothing such as the robe are connected not only with aesthetic values, but also with axiological issues. That kind of beauty Cicero termed *decorum*; it contained the values of dignity (*dignitas*) and gravity (*gravitas*). Thus beside the materiality of the clothing, a robe also has a symbolic dimension. Clothing adds to the framework of authority. It obligates to what is appropriate and what is decorous. Wearing the official robe during court proceedings follows a tradition of many years. It is the duty of the prosecutor, it is also a sign of the dignity of the office, and raises the prestige of the proceedings. Through its form and colour, the robe identifies the people wearing it. The right to wear it is at the same time a duty to present specific ethical and moral attitudes.

The gown is also an important element of creating the bearing of an orator, an element through which s/he shall be perceived even before speaking. In ancient Rome, toga became synonymous with public speaking. It is part of the cultural context of performing that profession. [...] It is a corset, a yoke limiting excessive expression. [...] The robe's "draperies" and colour of the jabot add nobilitation, and at the same time emphasise the idea they serve. Prosecutors' court speeches, presented publicly, should also have a great educational aspect, and teach grace and respectability. [...] Janusz Jamontt indicated quite rightfully, albeit in somewhat grandiloquent terms, that "he who states that the outside and decorative side is of no significance, knows nothing of the psychology of the crowd, more sensitive to form than even to content. Thus if we wish our courts to be respected, we should take care to have everyone leave the courtroom with the same impression as you leave with after a solemn church service." The robe is a prop to visualise authority, reverence, sternness. Not only is the decorative element of importance, but also the manner of use (wearing, buttoning). In that way, a prosecutor's gown bears witness to the image of the office. The robe is thus an element of a ritual with a significant procedural role. It is not the overload of symbolism, fetishizing of clothing, routine of gestures, decorations or props that are the aim; the goal is to evoke authority. The robe enforces precise weighing of legal expressions²³.

²² G. ALTHOFF, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, Primus Verlag GmbH, 2003, p. 31.

²³ M. MISTYGACZ, *Usytuowanie i strój urzędowy prokuratora w postępowaniu sądowym*, "Prokuratura i Prawo" 10 (2014), pp. 73-74, here without footnotes present in the original.

Examples of charging elements of clothing or items with symbolic senses could be multiplied²⁴. The phenomenon concerns most areas of social life, academic customs, religion and liturgy, court, culture, politics; it strengthens authority, co-creates rituals, and is a significant means of social impact:

[...] politics is in large part a matter of symbols. The use of symbols in politics is not merely a means (rhetorical, demagogic, promotional) of achieving and maintaining political power, manifested and practised on a different, non-symbolic, 'real' level of reality. The field of the symbolic is itself the greatest and richest empire which politicians and their generals, priests and poets conquer in salvos of words, volleys, sermons and verses. The power to which they aspire, later to revel in it, is in fact power over symbol²⁵.

*

The discussed issues lead directly to another problem area which ought to be at least mentioned – fascism. That recurrent political phenomenon also remains connected to *fasces* in various manners. Starting with etymology of the name (from Latin *fasces* and Italian *fascio* – bundle, association), related to the original organisational structure of trade unions, through Benito Mussolini's²⁶ hunger for references to ancient symbols and imperial traditions, down to the ideology which brutally subjected any human individual to the power apparatus. Multiple points of convergence could be found, as indicated by the title of one of the books analysing fascist ideology and pragmatics: *Fascinating Fascism* by Susan Sontag, to indicate just one example. It could be far-fetched to suggest that Norwid somehow predicted the threat of a political doctrine which appeared several decades later to capture human minds. Yet his perspicacity did allow to see the threats posed to the freedom of an individual by a totalitarian and authoritarian state with imperialist ambitions²⁷.

²⁴ "Symbolicity is not a property either of objects, or of acts, or of utterances, but of conceptual representations that describe or interpret them." See D. FREEDBERG, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, University of Chicago Press 1991, p. 79.

²⁵ I. ČOLOVIĆ, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology*, transl. by C. Hawkesworth, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2002, p. 1.

²⁶ Online resources and historical publications hold hundreds of archive photos from Mussolini's rule which show how readily the motif of *fasces* was used in propaganda and in building state symbolism.

²⁷ Some valuable context for broader reflection within this area is provided e.g. by Wolfgang Sofsky's book *Traktat über die Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main 1996).

*

The motif of *fascēs* appears once more in the poem, in song XXV. The fragment provides a bitter and ironic assessment of the degenerated Rome given by the poem's protagonist, Jason:

“Oto – Mistrz rzecze – masz ich – to – Rzymianie!
Pompejuszowi wnukowie – któremu
Macicę winną ze złota na ścianie
Zawiesił judzki król lat nieco temu – ”
I dodał: “Z chwili samego wyboru
Czy nie odgadłbyś *fascēs* i toporu?
(DW III, 271-272)

The negative presentation of this element of ancient colouring is thus completed and confirmed with an assessment deep in the poem. Jason mentions also the other component of *fascēs* – the axe. That is an important motif in itself, and one which appears several times in the poem. It definitely completes and co-decides on the author's negative view on *fascēs*. It is the lictors' attribute in the scene of leading the captives to trial, it anticipates their martyrdom, is used to break the gate in Jason's house, to finally become an instrument of the absurd crime committed on the Epirote. Norwid does write of a representative of Roman police who threw down the axe he held, but that role was definitely played by lictors, since only they were allowed to carry that kind of weapon, even if only outside the City.

The motif of *fascēs* is presented negatively on several planes: by the protagonists of the poem, in the narrative and narrator's comments, and finally in a dimension which can be recognised as the author's own perspective, i.e. in footnotes. The events of the presented world confirm the narrator's intuition or – if you change the direction of the analysis – the author's convictions are transformed into events in the story and placed within action and internal judgements passed by the protagonists. Those factors prove the motif's rank in the work and in the author's ideological construction. One can therefore consider that the negative values symbolised by *fascēs* and the axe were viewed in this manner by Norwid, who used that motif in various functions and dimensions to characterise the threats to the human and the society from a callous “police” state – in contemporary terms – and its officials.

There remain many questions. Why does Norwid indicate the negative stigma of the archaic *fascēs* as an element of an oppressive system with such consistency, and yet the narrator of the poem yields in almost magical fascination to the beauty of marching legions? Does that result from a different view on a regular army as

a state-forming factor, and on a dead symbol of violence and domination over one's neighbour? Or is it perhaps a consequence of the adopted narrating perspective and a viewpoint typical for those times: trust and delight in the power of the marching army, and fear of the attributes of authority, associated with a threat to personal freedom?

*

Chapter XXIV of *Quidam* is worthy of a separate interpretation if just for the aspect of inner motivation and the sequence of events leading to the death of the protagonist, or due to the rank of issues discussed, which are key issues for the work as well as for all Norwid's work (e.g. irony as a tool to reveal the truth). Activated with the uprising in Judea, the machine or avalanche of social unrest, irritation, anger and uncertainty finds an absurd outlet in the act of killing a man. A half-sociological analysis, which still goes beyond a description of behaviours and processes from outside, reaches for cardinal values and finds there the measure to judge the foul deed committed in the Roman market. In that diagnosis, the turbidity, madness, illness, decline of will, confusion, and first of all common social falsehood lead up to insanity of the individual and the collective:

Krzywe na proste, a *proste* na krzywe
Paraliżując w człowieku zbiorowym –
Co – że zapomniał się *nim* – jest niezdrowym.
(DW III, 256)

W mowy ogóle, w ogóle pojęcia
Fałsz jakiś, *zapał* jakiś *nie-gorący*
Rządził i ludzie bywali chwilami,
Jakoby sobą nie władnęli sami.
(DW III, 257)

The motifs of non-authenticity of feelings and human behaviours, of subordinating freedom to conventions, of choosing artificiality and falsehood instead of anchoring your life in truth are found throughout all Norwid's works. That accusation was cried out already by Wiesław in *Promethidion* in prophetic fervour:

I tak – wróżbiarze, z *trafów* się karmiący,
To są *dzisiejsi świata* politycy,
Kuglarze – *Fatum słudzy* – czarownicy!
[...]

Stąd to natchniony kmieć na *trafowników*,
 Na powierzchownej prawdy udawaczy,
 Ma ono mądre słowo – *Carowników*.
Car w ludzie jest to, co *le prestige* znaczy.
 – Więc niechaj *prawdą dla prawdy* walczący
 Wpierw *rozczarują* Czar ów czarujący,
 Car ów, co władzy zewnętrznym kłamaniem
 (Więc nie *od Boga władzy pochodzącej*),
 Niech Go odgarną dziś – a dziś powstaniem!
 [...]

A *czar ów* – w nas jest, kiedy się drapujem;
 W niewiastach, kiedy anielskości kłamią;
 W duchownych, w *których* ducha mało czujem,
 W konspiratorach, co sztylety łamią
 Na wykrzykników trupie; w mężach stanu,
 Co w oknach lampy palą przez noc całą;
 W poetach, ile zaślepieni chwałą...
Najjaśniejszemu (?) ci wciąż służą panu,
 Bo on – to *papież czaru*. [...]

(DW IV, 125-126)

Quidam is not just a parable about a seeker of truth. It is also an account from the narrator's and author's search for the truth by unmasking the falsehood of successive dimensions and areas of social life, artificiality of "masters", social depravity, oppressiveness of the police apparatus, mistaking prophets, degenerate aristocracy, lost teachers. Norwid shows not only the drama of the young man from Epirus, whose successive meetings with people lead him to a deeper sense of loss and cognitive dystrophy. The police-generated, judicial and symbolic violence from state institutions enhances that threat and hinders the search for identity. The author's insight and analysis of ancient reality determinants and symbolic senses of details lead on a ground-breaking path towards today's findings of anthropology, sociology, psychology, political studies or ethnology, preceding them by far²⁸.

²⁸ It seems that much of Norwid's exceptional and individual character could be made visible by using tools and categories developed by social studies. For instance, it would be possible to analyse Norwid's stand towards violence committed against an individual by an organisation, institution, or state, considering the findings of social impact researchers. The conceptual framework proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, including his concept of symbolic violence, could be useful for that purpose. The use of specialist analytical tools would certainly allow to verify or extend the current knowledge on Norwid's view on the human and on social processes. Such activation of new study and interpretation contexts seems necessary not only for *Stygmata*, but also in the case of situations so important for the writer when the freedom of an individual is threatened by pressures of social form, not limited merely to huge armies and police of both sexes.

Accepting the truth and searching for it assume disposal of whatever obscures and distorts it, and liberation from falsehood. In *Promethidion*, Norwid shows the omnipresence of falsehood in the society contemporary to him, in various groups of its representatives and in various individual attitudes. In *Quidam*, his analysis reaches deep into the past and extends the diagnosis to the "collective human", adding e.g. fascination to the symptoms of the common degenerative disease. In both works, he seeks traces and reasons for the attitudes and behaviours which falsify and distort reality: in language miasma, in hereditary gestures, in the stigma of rejecting the truth. The durability of this motif in Norwid's work is amazing. As a matter of fact, a separate reading of *Quidam* could be done on the presence of that fundamental opposition of falsehood and truth in the poem. It seems that this opposition decides on the dynamics of events, helps judge the protagonists, indicates the apparent and the real masters, allows to judge the Greek, Jewish and Roman civilisations, identifies the historical mechanisms which result from it, juxtaposes the immensity of evil built on falsehood to a hope of growth of the mustard seed of truth. The process continues. Between the dawn and dispersion of night...

Translated by Anna Maria Gernand

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FASCES. NORWIDA INTUICJE CZYTANIA SYMBOLU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł analizuje semantykę motywu *fascēs* w poemacie *Quidam*. Motyw obecny jest w różnych płaszczyznach utworu: w narracji zorientowanej na oddanie kolorytu historycznego, w wypowiedziach i ocenach bohaterów, jako element narracyjnych odniesień do współczesności, wreszcie w autorskich komentarzach zlokalizowanych w przypisach. W każdym z przypadków akcentowane jest negatywne znaczenie motywu, wiążące się z zagrożeniem, jakie dla wolności jednostki niesie państwo i realizowana w jego polityce przemoc, dostrzegana także w komunikacji rytualnej czy – po wiekach – w symbolice architektonicznych detali faszystowskiego państwa Mussoliniego. Norwidowa refleksja nad pokrewnym etymologicznie pojęciem *fascynacji* prowadzi nas do bardziej ogólnych wniosków dotyczących dominującej opozycji prawdy i fałszu jako jednego z zasadniczych tematów jego myśli i twórczości.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; fascēs; topór; motyw; symbol; przemoc; prawda; fałsz; wolność.

FASCES. NORWID'S INTUITIONS IN READING A SYMBOL

S u m m a r y

The article analyses the semantics of the *fascēs* motif in the poem *Quidam*. The motif is present on various levels of the work: in the narrative aimed at rendering the historical flavour, in the statements and evaluations of the protagonists, as an element of narrative references to the contemporary era, and finally in the author's comments in the footnotes. In each case, the negative meaning of the motif is emphasised, which relates to the threat to the freedom of an individual posed by the state and violence intrinsic to its politics, also visible in ritualistic communication, or – centuries later – in the symbolism of architectural details of the fascist state of Mussolini. Norwid's reflections on the etymologically related concept of *fascination* leads us to more general conclusions about the dominant opposition of truth and falsehood as one of the principal themes of his thought and artistic work.

Key words: Cyprian Norwid; fascēs; axe; motif; symbol; violence; truth; falsehood; freedom.

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